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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: BY-ELECTION DEEPENS OPPOSITION RIFT

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11. (U) SUMMARY. An upcoming parliamentary by-election in southwestern Mbeya Rural district has exposed a sharpening rivalry between Tanzania's two main opposition parties, CUF and CHADEMA. Although ruling CCM is expected to retain the seat by a large margin, the opposition's inability to agree on a single candidate has further strengthened CCM's position. The Embassy will participate in an observer mission to the election. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND -----

12. (U) The January 26 by-election in Mbeya Rural follows the November death of MP Richard Nyaulawa, who had occupied the seat since 2005. Because of Tanzanian electoral laws, this by-election is likely to be the last on mainland Tanzania before the 2010 general elections.

13. (U) Mbeya Rural, like most of southern Tanzania, has long been a stronghold of the ruling CCM party, which has governed Tanzania since independence. CCM politicians have held the seat since 1995, when multiparty elections began. In 2005, Richard Nyaulawa won nearly 80 percent of the vote, very close to the level of national support for President Kikwete. The district economy is predominantly agricultural, including production of some export crops such as tea and coffee, and per capita GDP is modestly above the national average (2006 figures).

CANDIDATES -----

14. (U) CCM's dominance in the district suggests that the real contest likely occurred in the nominating process. Reverend Luckson Mwanjale, a Lutheran minister, beat out a field including a retired senior military officer. Mwanjale, who placed second to Nyaulawa for the 2005 nomination, is a well-known local figure in both politics and religion. The Mbeya region is known for its (mainly Christian) religiosity.

15. (U) The candidate for the Civic United Front (CUF), Daudi Mponzi, is himself mainly associated with CCM. Mponzi, a retired telecommunications engineer, left CCM after losing earlier efforts to gain the nomination for the parliamentary candidacy. Mponzi has campaigned on a theme of CCM incompetence and neglect of the district.

16. (U) There is also a third candidate, Subi Mwakapiki, from the small Sauti ya Umma (Voice of the People) party. Sauti ya Umma's entry into the race apparently stems from a belief that Mponzi as a former CCM member does not represent a real opposition candidate. (Note: In 2005, Mponzi sought the Sauti ya Umma nomination after losing out within CCM, but was rebuffed.)

OPPOSITION INFIGHTING

¶17. (U) Two other parties, CHADEMA (Party of Democracy and Development) and the Democratic Party (DP), also put forth candidates. However, the CCM and CUF candidates successfully sought their disqualification on obscure technical grounds (the CHADEMA and DP candidates had sworn to their candidacy documents before a lawyer rather than a judge, as electoral law requires). The National Electoral Commission upheld the local ruling, leaving CHADEMA and DP no recourse prior to the by-election.

¶18. (SBU) Senior CUF official Ismail Jussa told Poloff that CUF had written to the other parties in advance of the by-election seeking a united front behind CUF's candidate. CUF argued that its second-place finish in the district in 2005 (albeit with under ten percent of the vote) justified CUF to take the opposition lead. CHADEMA, fresh from its victory in the Tarime by-election (reftel), and convinced of its momentum, declined to yield the field. After the disqualification of its candidate, partly at CUF instigation, CHADEMA has explicitly declined to support CUF's candidate. This stance further reduces the chances of Mponzi, although he picked up the support of other smaller opposition parties, including NCCR-Mageuzi and the Tanzanian Labor Party, whose priority is to increase any opposition representation in Parliament.

¶19. (U) The election campaign itself has been calm. Apart from the opposition wrangling, the media has found little to report. In contrast to Tarime, neither CCM nor CUF has devoted serious resources to the contest. We will participate in an observer

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mission, mostly with European delegations, to evaluate the atmosphere and the organization of the election.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) The opposition disputes in Mbeya bode poorly for efforts to reduce CCM's overwhelming parliamentary majority in the 2010 elections. In 2005, more than twenty CCM candidates won with plurality and might have been defeated by a united opposition. Part of the dispute stems from CUF's identification as a Zanzibar-based party and CHADEMA's efforts to establish itself as the primary mainland opposition. In 2005, CUF won the most opposition votes both nationally and on the mainland, but did not win any mainland seats, while CHADEMA won five. The future of opposition cooperation will also be affected by pending amendments to the Political Parties Act, slated to be considered by Parliament at its next session. An important open question is whether parties will be permitted to merge without disbanding (and thereby losing any parliamentary seats).

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